

# Some want to stop the start

Forum on school  
time changes draws  
varied opinions

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The words written on two sheets of white paper summed up people's states of mind after the school start time forum held Monday night.

On one sheet, someone had written that their children were now missing breakfast.

On another sheet, someone had written that their children were finally eating breakfast.

If anyone was looking for a consensus Monday night, they were going to be disappointed.

The session was designed to elicit opinions about the change in school start times and the roughly 90 people in the room had plenty of them.

Participants were broken up into small groups and huddled around tables like poker players ready to play a hand.

But rather than dealing cards, each group dealt their feelings and experiences about how the changes in start times had affected them and their children.

At one table, Dave Wholey, the father of two high school students called the change a "positive experience." His children were getting more sleep. But parent Marie Gill said that the change had caused her middle school child "a lot of stress" and meant her younger children were getting out of bed at 6:30 a.m. "it's been overwhelming," for them, she added.

Late buses were a complaint for many parents, though Wholey commented that was an issue even when he was a student.

Whether the change had any effect on academic performance was open to debate as well. While Mary Lynn Carson, who has children in both the middle and high schools, said she

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had seen an improvement in her children's attitudes, she also noted it was too early to make any conclusions about the effect the change had on academic performance.

Other concerns around the included fatigue in younger children who were now getting up earlier and the cost of the after school program at the Duxbury Student Union.

Around the room, and when each group made its presentation to the whole room, certain themes emerged.

For many, fixing the bus problem was paramount. Some suggested having a graduate program review the bus plan to improve efficiency, others asked whether some sort of pressure could be put upon First Student to improve performance, while other suggested making St. George Street one way during school hours or bringing transportation back in the hands of the school department. Others suggested having fundraisers to pay for additional transportation.

While many decried the bad feelings the change had inspired, someone else wanted to know why the school committee had "bungled the change so badly."

"How do five people have so much power to affect so many?"

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Later in the evening, many parents moaned when, responding to a question about how long it would take to see if the start time change was having the desired effect, Superintendent Sue Skeiber said that it would take between two and three years to reach a conclusion.

"I feel one of my children is being used as a guinea pig," said one parent.

When asked if the plan would be changed if it were shown to be failure, Skeiber said "absolutely."

If there was any pattern to be seen in the room, it seemed as though high school and middle school parents were more pleased with the change than Alden School parents. One parent said that "it's a long day for young kids," while others noted

that, while Chandler School children saw no time change, they sometimes had to wake earlier to accommodate the new schedule of their older siblings. One of those parents, in trying to get their Alden and Chandler kids up and going, noted that the only thing about the change that works "is the kid's alarm clock."

And of course, not all parents of DHS students were happy, noting that the reduction in after school time cut into jobs and extracurricular activities.

Not surprisingly, some Alden parents said their children liked having additional playtime after school.

At the end of the session, it was promised that all the comments, written on large sheets of white paper, would be posted on the school department Web site.